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Book review

D. Pojani, D. Stead. (Eds.), The Urban Transport Crisis in Emerging Economies, Springer International Publishing (2017). ISBN: 978-3-319-43849-8 €118.99 (ebook) €149.99 (Hardcover)

Most research on urban transport focuses on countries with high levels of average household income, government revenues, transport infrastructure, and accessibility. These levels continue to rise, but slowly, and levels have not changed much for decades now. Motorization may have peaked overall and may even be in decline in some of these countries. However, only roughly a quarter of the world's population lives in these countries. What about the rest of the population who will become a much larger share in absolute and relative terms over the coming decades? The urban transport conditions in these countries are changing rapidly in a context of comparatively low levels of income, GDP, infrastructure, and accessibility, and they have received comparatively little attention in the academic literature, particularly if China is excluded. The rates of change and levels of problems in fast-growing economies dwarf those found in the high-income economies.

The Urban Transport Crisis in Emerging Economies, edited by Dorina Pojani in Australia and Dominic Stead in the Netherlands, compiles case studies of urban transportation in countries with GDP and household incomes falling largely into a middle range. The central idea of the book is that emerging economies have urban transport systems that are in a state of crisis that is worsening. Whether this deterioration will continue indefinitely or whether it will stabilize or improve is a compelling question. The book's authors favour reversing current trends and finding ways of reducing the use of automobiles and encouraging non-motorized transport (bicycling and walking) as well as public transport, as a means of increasing mobility without excessive pollution, congestion, and collisions.

Each of the twelve chapters covers a number of cities in one country, including lower middle-income Nigeria, upper middle-income Brazil, and Russia, at the low end of the high-income range. The diversity of conditions and population covered are massive and arguably much greater than those in high-income countries. Some chapters concentrate exclusively on the country's largest city (e.g. Jakarta and Mexico City), while others provide a survey of numerous cities of varying sizes (e.g. seven cities in Iran). This further adds to the complexity of the topic and approach of this book. I wondered if simply focusing on one city of a similar scale (e.g. a mega-city) in each country could have been sufficient to address the editors' central goal of providing a “comparative account of the situation across all these countries” (p. 1).

The individual case study authors are based not only in academia but also in a wide variety of institutional settings in many countries. They include new and established scholars and practitioners, with a mix of disciplinary and normative preferences (e.g. for modes or levels of state involvement). An example of the diversity of views is reflected in the participation of both Jeff Kenworthy and José Gomez-Ibañez, two protagonists in a famous urban transport debate back in the early 1990s. In addition to the diversity of backgrounds and perspectives of the contributors, the data used in the case studies is not standardized. While the result is a sense of richness and diversity of quantification, this precludes comparison or statistical analysis. Nonetheless, the editors attempt to sort through this complexity by having the authors arrange their case study material under the same five headings (urban land use patterns and spatial structure, trends in transport use and mobility, urban transport problems, urban transport governance, decision-making, and financing, and proposed urban transport solutions and implementation issues). In a few chapters, the authors go even further, and discuss topics such as automobile manufacturing or intercity travel.

While to some extent a diversity of topics and approaches is an inevitable feature of an edited volume, I can't help but to compare it to some famous multi-city comparative studies (e.g. Newman and Kenworthy, 1989; Pucher and Lefèvre, 1996) or compilations of case studies (e.g. Thomson, 1977; Cervero, 1998). At the core of each of these works was a focus on patterns and trends in land use and transport infrastructure, without much on the topics of governance, decision-making, financing, proposed solutions, and implementation issues. The Urban Transport Crisis in Emerging Economies casts the net so wide that the level of detail is hard to comprehend or to compare. In the concluding chapter Pojani and Stead provide a summary under the same five headings used in each of the case studies, and provide broad recommendations. The comparison lacks a systematic approach covering all of the cities and conditions found in the case studies.

Most of the recommendations are common to university courses and planning documents produced in high income countries; in the end I was hoping for a more forceful argument regarding the urban transport conditions which may be more complicated and fundamentally different than those found in high-income countries. Simply documenting that conditions were bad and getting worse, perhaps at speeds, scales, or in ways never experienced before could have been a contribution to the literature. What about the size of metropolitan areas and proliferation of motorized vehicles relative to income levels? I started out with skepticism concerning the tantalizing and counter-intuitive starting claim that as wealth increases, things get worse; are transport conditions in a New York or Vienna really worse than those in a Sao Paolo or Cape Town, and are much better in a Dhaka or Lagos? There are numerous studies on urban transport transitions and motorization and environmental impacts in the developing world, and this study would have benefitted from more engagement with that literature.

Notwithstanding these shortcomings I see myself consulting this volume as a reference on the transport conditions in a variety of cities that I and most of the world's population know little about because there is so little data and research. Putting this information in one volume is a major contribution that will assist academics and practitioners. It could stimulate the generation of testable hypotheses (including the starting proposition that urban transport conditions worsen as incomes rise, as well as the particular conditions that worsen, the

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causes and effects, and whether the relationships are linear or whether there are thresholds, or even bell-shaped curves). For these reasons I commend Pojani and Stead for taking on this ambitious enterprise.

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